

[Bob Kinzel, VPR News](#)

Welch was part of a bi-partisan Congressional delegation that traveled to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Lebanon.

While in Afghanistan, Welch met with some of the 1500 Vermont Guard troops who are serving a year long deployment in that country.

Welch says the trip highlighted several of his concerns about the war.

The first is that some Pakistani officials are allowing members of the Afghan Taliban to hide in Pakistan.

(Welch) "We need a lighter footprint in Afghanistan and we have to get some progress in Pakistan... if the Afghan Taliban literally have safe haven and they're attacking our troops, then it's going to be very difficult for this to be resolved."

(Kinzel) Welch says the time has come to take a firm stand with the Pakistani government on this issue.

(Welch) "The Pakistani military gets billions of dollars in aid from the United States taxpayer and the question that I ask is, 'why don't we condition our aid to the Pakistani military on them actively trying to eliminate a threat to the region as well as to our soldiers?'"

(Kinzel) Welch visited several small villages where U.S. special operations teams have been working successfully with local officials.

Welch says the problem with this approach is that there are just 51 special teams trying to cover several thousand villages.

(Welch) "When you try to anticipate how will you replicate the presence of these soldiers who do a great job where they are but can you bring that up to a scale that would have an effect on all these villages. And all these villages are up for grabs - the political loyalties go either way."

(Kinzel) Welch says the trip underscored his belief that the United States needs a new approach in Afghanistan.

(Welch) "You just don't have enough special forces teams to be in every village. You don't have enough agricultural experts, you don't have enough taxpayer ability to pay the billions of dollars that this effort requires - then it suggests you need to take a look at another strategy."

(Kinzel) Welch says he's also concerned about the level of corruption that exists among many members of the Afghan government.

For VPR News, I'm Bob Kinzel in Montpelier.